

# STATE OF THE RIVER 2001

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## Facts About The Lower Mississippi River

- The Lower Mississippi is the effluence of the largest watershed system in North America, and second largest in the world, second only to the Amazon River
- The largest natural wetlands area in North America is located along the Lower Mississippi, the bayous of the Mississippi and the Atchafalaya Basin.
- The "Delta" is considered to be comprised of 235 counties and parishes in 8 states with a population of 26 million citizens (about 10 % of the population) - *Secretary of Transportation's Report to the President on the Delta Initiative*
- Two of the top five busiest ports in the U.S. are located along the Lower Mississippi, including the nation's busiest, the Port of South Louisiana - *U.S. Maritime Administration 1999*
- The first and oldest European settlement along the river is located in the Lower Mississippi, Natchez, Mississippi
- Historically the second largest port of immigrant entry into the U.S. during the 19th Century, New Orleans, Louisiana
- Both Jazz and the Blues were born along the Lower Mississippi
- The largest concentration of Antebellum homes and buildings are located along the Lower Mississippi from Natchez to New Orleans



## RIVER PROFILE

The Lower Mississippi River is the most heavily trafficked river system in the United States and is part of the largest watershed system on the continent. Its historic, economic and environmental impact for the nation, the continent and the hemisphere is immeasurable. Pre-Columbian and European settlement of the Lower Mississippi River Valley was motivated primarily by the river's access to the interior of the continent and by its use as a water highway. As such, some of this nation's most precious and unique historic, economic and cultural resources are located in the Lower Mississippi Valley. The economic well-being of 26 of the 48 continental United States directly depends on the Mississippi River and other adjoining river systems. Equally dependent is the environmental health of the landmass between the Appalachians and the Rocky Mountains, extending northward into Canada and well into the Gulf of Mexico. The Mississippi River is an ecological marvel, a cultural and historic treasure, and a critical working river highway for the entire continent. Its nature is indivisible...it continues to be the primary waterway transportation system of the country while, at the same time, being a major ecological engine affecting the entire center of the continent and the Gulf of Mexico.

The balanced use of the river as both an environmental and cultural treasure, and an economic byway is a complex and, at times, a controversial issue. The Lower Mississippi River's geographic location as the watershed effluence not only makes it dependent upon proper use and care of the watershed within the delta, but dependent upon six other major river systems further upstream. Due to its strategic location as a transportation hub and its proximity to vast quantities of offshore resources, the Lower Mississippi River has one of the largest concentrations of heavy industry, manufacturing and marine transportation in the world. Two of the top five busiest ports in the United States are located along the Lower Mississippi River, including the nation's busiest, the Port of South Louisiana. But this concentration is not equally distributed throughout the delta. Large tracts of agricultural acreage, historically significant small communities and undeveloped natural landscapes comprise most of the delta, interspersed by fewer concentrations of industry and metropolitan areas. With some exceptions, the Lower Mississippi River Delta has not fully enjoyed economic boom times as has the rest of the nation although it plays a critical role in creating economic prosperity for the entire nation. The country as a whole is dependent upon this industrial and transportation complex, with communities along the river being even more dependent.

Significant environmental and cultural loss accompanies robust economic prosperity. As the national economy grows, so do the stresses on the river and other infrastructures. Reduced water quality and quantity, habitat loss, wetlands loss, and overuse of roads and highways have resulted. Sadly, delta's share in this prosperity is not keeping pace with the rest of the country or with the environmental, social and cultural contributions being made by delta communities. Increased stresses on the environment, the river and the infrastructure are outpacing the economic benefits, and communities are encountering increased difficulties in many other areas of the social structure, such as education, public health, family income, public safety and affordable housing. Communities along the river know this better than anyone and are engaged finding solutions to reverse these trends believing that the intrinsic value of the river, environment, culture, history and people of the Lower Mississippi River will define their path. As such, they look to government as one of many institutions to assist them in achieving the balanced use of the river, maintaining and revitalizing their current economic base, sharing equally in economic growth, improving the health and well being of the communities, preserving a unique and vibrant culture, and protecting and restoring their environmental treasures.

## Community Project Priorities

- Non-motorized vehicle, hiking and biking trails with scenic overlooks
  - Mississippi River Trail in Memphis
  - Levee-top trails/scenic overlooks in the Louisiana Parishes
  - City and town river walks in Memphis TN, Natchez MS, Vicksburg, Plaquemines LA, Donaldsonville LA, Jefferson and St. Bernard Parishes LA
- Restoration of riverfronts and adaptive reuse of historic city and town centers with the focus on tourism
  - Memphis Riverfront Development Project
  - Donaldsonville LA Riverfront Development Project
  - Baton Rouge Riverfront Revitalization Project
  - Port Allen LA Levee Top Enhancement Project
  - Plaquemines LA Levee Top Enhancement Project
  - Westwego LA Town Center Revitalization Project
- Habitat and wetlands restoration and Green spaces
  - Wolf River Restoration Project, Memphis TN
  - Nonconnah Creek Restoration Project and Nature Trail, Memphis TN
  - Ascension Parish Nature Trail, LA
  - Batture Linear Park, Jefferson Parish LA
  - Fort Jefferson Nature Preserve Project, Plaquemines Parish LA
- Historic Site Designation and Restoration
  - Fort Butler Restoration,

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# AMERICAN HERITAGE RIVERS INITIATIVE AND THE COMMUNITY



Communities agree that a balanced and prudent use of the river is the approach that should be taken. As they formulate their local visions for the future of the river, communities have consistently selected riverfront development/economic revitalization as the first step in achieving their goals. Citizens along the Lower Mississippi River see no contradiction between revitalizing the economy of the riverfronts while, at the same time, protecting the environment and preserving their culture. On the contrary, they understand that in order to protect these precious resources, they must have a reliable revenue base to fund their share of the preservation, restoration and revitalization efforts. As such, they first look to preserving and improving their existing economic base, followed by attracting new sources of revenues through smart economic growth and riverfront revitalization. Simultaneously, communities are coming together in common cause and partnering with existing businesses and industry in offsetting the impact of past commercial use of the river. Understanding that new business and economic resources will be attracted to an area that is environmentally healthy, economically sound and culturally vibrant, they are looking to capitalize on their preserved and revitalized city centers, riverfronts, landscapes, cultures and histories as a means to diversify their economies, particularly in the area of cultural and ecotourism, and retail enterprises that support visitor destinations. As economies improve, investment in community infrastructure will increase, which will allow more investment in preserving and protecting environment and culture resources. Achieving and offering a clean, safe and attractive place to live, work and raise families, where a robust economy, a healthy environment and a vibrant culture can coexist, will ultimately sustain itself and benefit all.

In 1997, the announcement of the American Heritage Rivers Initiative received an enthusiastic welcome from many communities in the Lower Mississippi River Delta. In order to bring about the changes and improvements needed in the region, the communities look to the federal government as a principal partner in assisting their efforts through financial investment and technical assistance. The principle that the initiative is community-led, community-driven, government-supported is particularly attractive to the communities. In 1998, a number of communities from Memphis, Tennessee to the mouth of the Mississippi River were designated the Lower Mississippi American Heritage River. In response, communities in the designated area organized and established the Lower Mississippi American Heritage River Alliance, an umbrella organization that coordinates common efforts while, at the same time, allows local communities to pursue their vision plans.

Over the course of the following two years, Alliance member efforts have achieved many successes and met with many frustrations. Member communities have succeeded in identifying and prioritizing projects, have developed grassroots and political support for these projects, and have established new and innovative partnerships with business, industry, federal and state agencies, and non-government organizations. Additionally, they have combined efforts on projects of regional significance, such as the Mississippi River Trail and regional tourism efforts. As stated, many projects involve the revitalization of riverfronts and town centers to generate economic renewal. Other project types include adaptive reuse of historic buildings and sites, conversion of Brownfield sites construction of interpretive and visitor welcome centers, biking and hiking trails, restoration of urban streams with construction of a nature walk, along with some major metropolitan projects, such as the Memphis Riverfront Development Project and the Mississippi river institute and National Museum of the Mississippi in New Orleans.

# What We Need To Succeed

In order for members of the Lower Mississippi American Heritage River Alliance to continue to improve their communities, actions from both the Legislative and Executive Branches of the federal government are needed. Some of these action items are general in nature, some are specific. Ultimately, all of these needs involve identifying and delivering much-needed funding for projects at the community level. To generalize the primary need of the communities...*they need accessible, fully-funded grant programs focused on projects for American Heritage Rivers member communities.*

- Separate appropriated funding for American Heritage Rivers community projects or funding set aside in current grant programs for American Heritage Rivers community projects.
- Fully funded community grant programs that support economic development, historic and cultural preservation, and environmental protection and restoration including grants for construction of projects.
- Fully funded Lands Legacy Program and develop grant programs to assist communities in purchasing lands to be developed as green spaces, habitats or non-motorized vehicular paths.
- Authorize and appropriate funding through the Army Corps of Engineers or the TEA-21 Enhancement Funds specifically for the following non-motorized vehicle, hiking and biking paths:
  - St. Bernard Parish, LA - \$50K planning grant and \$1.7M construction grant for 13.8 miles of paths (Part of Mississippi River Trail)
  - West Baton Rouge Parish, LA - \$525K planning grant and \$1.9M construction grant for 9.5 miles of paths (Part of Mississippi River Trail)
  - Ascension Parish, LA - \$50K planning grant and \$1.2M construction grant for nature trail from Donaldsonville through bayous (Part of Mississippi River Trail)
  - Memphis/Shelby County, TN - Authorize and appropriate \$2.6M in Nonconnah Creek Flood Control Project for planning and construction of trail and greenway. Initial funding needed: \$1.5M
  - St. John Parish, LA - \$75K planning grant and a \$1.5M construction grant for Phase I of a 23 mile non-motorized vehicle path (Part of the Mississippi River Trail)
  - Memphis, TN - \$2M construction grant for green space and pedestrian paths along Memphis riverfront
  - SE Louisiana - \$1.5M grant for informational, directional and interpretive signage along the historic River Road between Baton Rouge and New Orleans
- Authorize and appropriate funding through the Army Corps of Engineers, Department of Interior or the TEA-21 Enhancement Funds specifically for the following greenways projects:
  - Jefferson Parish, LA - \$50K planning grant and \$900K construction grant for River Ridge Batture Greenway
  - New Orleans, LA - \$25K planning grant and \$500K construction grant for Point Park project along Industrial Canal
  - Vicksburg, MS - \$350K grant to conduct a feasibility study on a 56-acre greenspace/golf course/natural habitat (ACOE, DOAg, DOI)
- Authorize and appropriate funding for the following economic revitalization projects:
  - Ascension Parish, LA - \$1.5M construction grant for waterfront promenade and vessel landing (HUD, NRCS, ACOE, Rural Development Administration)
  - Vicksburg, MS - \$400K to conduct a

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## Community Project Priorities

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- Ascension Parish LA
- Germania Plantation Resurrection Ascension Parish LA
- Confederate Magazine Site, Jefferson Parish LA
- River Road Restoration in the Louisiana Parishes
- William Johnson House, Natchez, MS
- Interpretive Centers
  - Mississippi River Institute and Museum of the Mississippi
  - African-American Museum, Ascension Parish LA
  - Natchez Museum of African American History and Culture, Natchez, MS

### Examples Of What Community Partners Have Achieved So Far

- Establishment of a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit corporation, the Riverfront Development Corporation, contracted by the City of Memphis and vested with \$28M in local and state funding for the master planning and development of the Memphis riverfront
- \$200K Planning Assistance Funding from the U.S. Corps. of Engineers to help develop the Mississippi Riverfront master plan
- \$750K start up grant to the Riverfront Development Corporation received from the Plough Foundation, Memphis,
- \$405K Transportation Enhancement Grant from TEA-21 for river walk to the City of Memphis, TN
- Authorization for including a 26-mile nature trail and green space in the Nonconnah Creek Flood Control Project in Memphis and Shelby County, TN
- Partnership among Plaquemines Parish, LA National Guard and State of Louisiana to restore the historic Fort Jefferson Civil War site and surrounding 500 acres for transfer to the park system as a park and habitat
- Transfer of Brownfield property to Booker T. Washington Magnet High School, New Orleans LA, for construction of a vocational center, community jobs center and community computer center
- Partnership among Ascension Parish LA, Capitol Regional Planning Commission and the Army Corps of Engineers to conduct economic survey for the Parish and recommend plans for various tour vessel landings at historic plantation sites
- Phase I and II Brownfield Survey conducted and to be conducted by the Army Corps of Engineers

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### What We Need To Succeed

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feasibility study for expanding the Port of Vicksburg by 80 acres (EDA, ACOE)

- SE Louisiana - \$50K capacity building grant for the SE Louisiana Parishes Regional Tourism Alliance (EDA, Rural Development Administration, Small Business Administration, DOT)
- West Baton Rouge, LA - \$75K planning grant and \$1.2M construction grant for Mississippi Overlook Promenade extension and emergency response vessel piers (TEA-21, FEMA, ACOE)
- Iberville Parish, LA - \$1.2M construction grant for riverfront trail/trail completion (HUD, Rural Development, NRCS, ACOE, EDA)
- Natchez, MS - \$100K planning grant for reclaimed 'Roth Hill' development
- Natchez, MS - \$2.5m for development of Belwood Industrial Park (EDA, DOAg)
- Vicksburg, MS - \$846K grant for repair, upgrade and safety improvements to the Port of Vicksburg Terminal Facility (EDA, DOAg)
- Natchez, MS - \$100K planning grant for riverfront development project "Under the Hill" and near the proposed industrial park (EDA, NRCS, EPA)
- New Orleans, LA - \$1.5M planning grant for River Institute/River Museum (ACOE, NEH, DOD, DOT)
- Memphis, TN - \$2M construction grant for riverfront development phases (DOT, EDA, ACOE, DOAg)
- West Baton Rouge Parish, LA - \$1.2M planning grant for Mississippi River Visitors' Center as part of Port Allen Development Project (ACOE, DOT, HUD)
- Vicksburg, MS - \$500K planning grant to study the moving of KCS Railroad from the city center to an alternate route to allow river access (TEA-21)

- Authorize and appropriate funding for the following historic preservation projects:

- St. John Parish, LA - \$190K construction grant for stabilization, restoration and relocating of the Edgard Train Depot (DOT, NEH)
- Ascension Parish, LA - \$250K grant for capacity building and exhibit expansion at the Louisiana African American Museum (NEH, NEA)
- Vicksburg, MS - \$12M to construct the Lower Mississippi River Museum and Riverfront Interpretive Site (ACOE, NEH)
- St. John Parish, LA - \$150K planning and capacity-building grant for the Godchaux-Reserve Historical Society for the adaptive reuse of the Godchaux-Reserve House and the Leon Godchaux High School as a visitor/interpretive center (NEH and National Park Service)
- SE Louisiana - Establish the River Road as a Heritage Corridor and National Scenic Byway (DOT, National Park Service, NEH)
- Vicksburg, MS - Acquisition of the LGEN Pemberton, CSA, headquarters building and inclusion in the Vicksburg National Military Park (NEH, DOI)
- Plaquemines Parish, LA - \$750 grant to remove and reassemble a multiuse high school facility from the grounds of the historic Civil War fort, Fort Jackson, in order to transfer the 600 acre property to the federal or state park system as a military park and wildlife habitat. (EPA, National Park Service, DOD, HUD, Rural Development Administration)
- SE Louisiana - \$150K grant to conduct an in-depth survey and inventory of historic properties along the historic River Road (NEH, National Park Service)

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## What We Need To Succeed

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- Natchez, MS - \$500K grant to restore the administration building from fire damage for the historic African-American Holy Family School. (HUD, NEH, Rural Development Administration)
- Natchez, MS - \$1M to renovate Memorial Hall (DOI, NEH)
- Jefferson Parish, LA - \$50K planning grant for restoration of the Confederate Magazine historic site in Jefferson, LA
- Authorize and appropriate funding for the following educational enhancement projects:
  - New Orleans, LA - \$150K planning grant for expansion of the marine/aquaculture vocational training program, establishment of a community computer center and creation of an employment connection center at the traditionally African American Booker T. Washington Magnet High School (DOEd, ACOE, NOAA, EDA, DOEnergy, FCC)
  - SE Louisiana - \$50K capacity building grant for a preservation leadership program sponsored by the Mississippi River Road Commission (NEH, HUD)
- Authorize and appropriate funding for the following environmental projects:
  - New Orleans, LA - In conjunction with the Cities for Climate Control Campaign, \$50K planning and capacity-building grant to conduct a baseline emissions inventory, set an emissions reduction target, develop a Local Action Plan (LAP), and initiate such a plan in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (EPA)
- Request the following agency assistance to overcome process obstacles:
  - New Orleans, LA - EPA in facilitating the cleanup of a hazardous waste site in a low-income minority neighborhood. A Cooperative Agreement for cleanup has been in place for several years be-

tween the responsible parties and the State of Louisiana, and the responsible parties are completing their part in a timely fashion. The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, however, is not responding in kind. Seeking assistance from EPA or the congressional delegation to reinvigorate the process with LDEQ but to date, our efforts to reinvolve EPA have been unsuccessful

- Vicksburg, MS - Last year, the City of Vicksburg received a waiver under HR 4461 Section 770 for rural development housing. Section 770 states, "Notwithstanding any other provisions of law, the Secretary of Agriculture shall consider the City of Vicksburg, Mississippi, as meeting the requirements of a rural area in Section 520 of the Housing Act of 1949 (42 USC 1490). The waiver is set to expire in September of 2001, which constitutes a problem for getting the program initiated in meeting the tremendous need in the community. The city seeks to extend the waiver until the next census period and to include all of the Rural Development Programs eligible under the waiver.
- Memphis, TN - Although the Nonconah Creek Greenway and Wetland Area was authorized as part of WRDA86 and the Nonconah Creek Flood Control Project, and a study conducted, the construction phase of the project was never funded. ACOE now considers the construction phase as an entirely separate project or "new start", rather than the logical follow-on project to the authorized study. There is an agency moratorium on "new starts", which means that ACOE will not consider seeking appropriations for this project. Seeking assistance from ACOE or the congressional delegation in overcoming this obstacle

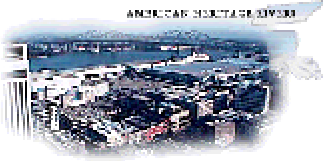
## Examples Of What Community Partners Have Achieved So Far

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at the proposed vocational center site for Booker T. Washington Magnet School

- Completion of the renovation of the historic Cobblestone section of the Memphis, TN riverfront
- \$35K Planning Grant from the SE Louisiana Regional Planning Commission to St. Bernard Parish LA, for master planning of a levee top non-motorized vehicle path
- \$550K planning grant from the State of Louisiana for master planning of the River Institute and Museum in New Orleans LA, being conducted by a partnership among Tulane University, Xavier University, the City of New Orleans and various federal agency partners
- \$1.97M from TEA-21 and the State of Louisiana for completion of Phase IV of the Mississippi River Trail hiking and biking path
- Approximately \$4.5M from TEA-21 and the State of Louisiana for the following projects:
  - St. John Parish: Bike/Pedestrian Path (Segment of the Pontchartrain Trace)
  - Jefferson Parish: West Bank Mississippi River Levee Bike Path, Segment 1
  - St. Charles Parish: Bike/Pedestrian Path, Phase A
  - New Orleans Department of Public Works: New Orleans Gateway Beautification Project
  - New Orleans - Parkway Partners: Upriver Greenway Corridor Project
  - Port Allen: Port Allen Levee Top Improvements





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## Lower Mississippi AHR Alliance Partners

### *Local Community Partners*

- Adams County, Mississippi
- Ascension Parish, Louisiana
- City of Memphis, Tennessee
- City of Natchez, Mississippi
- City of New Orleans, Louisiana
- City of Vicksburg, Mississippi
- East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana
- Iberville Parish, Louisiana
- Jefferson Parish, Louisiana
- Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana
- River Road Commission, State of Louisiana
- Shelby County, Tennessee
- St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana
- St. Charles Parish, Louisiana
- St. James Parish, Louisiana
- St. John the Baptist Parish, Louisiana
- Warren County, Mississippi
- West Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana

### *Federal Team Partners*

- Department of Agriculture
  - *Natural Resource Conservation Service*
  - *U.S. Forest Service*
- Department of Commerce
  - *Economic Development Administration*
- Department of Defense
  - *Army Corps of Engineers*
- Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Department of the Interior
  - *National Park Service*
- Department of Transportation
  - *U.S. Coast Guard*
  - *U.S. Maritime Administration*
- Environmental Protection Agency, Region VI

### *Other Project Partners*

- Orleans Parish School Board, Louisiana
- Wolf River Conservancy, Memphis
- Nonconnah Creek Restoration Association
- Capital Regional Planning Commission, Louisiana
- Riverfront Development Corporation, Memphis
- Louisiana Preservation Alliance
- Southeast Louisiana Regional Planning Commission
- Greater New Orleans Chamber of Commerce
- Eighth Marine Corps District, New Orleans
- The Plough Foundation, Memphis, Tennessee



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